

God's Work

July 11, 2010

Psalm 82 & Luke 10:25-37
(Hymns – 706, 726, 742, 712)

This is a Psalm about values.
What values guide your living in this world?
What values motivate you to get up in morning and live your life?
What values bring you the deep satisfaction of a life well lived?

God is in the judging seat in this Psalm.
He has summoned before him all the heathen gods and powers
to be charged and condemned.
The key test is whether they have done justice, loved kindness,
and walked humbly with Yahweh,
the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the world.

This picture of the God of Israel,
the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
summoning all the lesser gods,
the national gods of the peoples of the ancient Near East,
is common in the Old Testament.
It was part of the more ancient belief systems of the times.
If we think of these gods representing what those nations valued most,
then we can begin to make modern sense of the message of this Psalm.

Basically, it's about whose values rule,
what values do we follow in practice and what motivates us be that way.

The values that are most important to Yahweh,
the God of Israel and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
are clearly expressed in vss 3-4:

*Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

The other gods are charged with showing partiality to the wicked,
allowing, if not encouraging, the kinds of activities and systems
that keep people oppressed and weak and destitute.

The fact that they allow or encourage this to happen
is evidence that they lack knowledge and understanding.

They walk around in darkness.

Because of their ignorance,
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

Because of their injustices,
all the foundations of the Kingdom of God,
a society of peace and well-being,
are weakened.

Notice, they are not destroyed,
only shaken and weakened.

The righteous power of Yahweh,
the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
will not allow the promise and potential of his reign
to be swept away by lesser gods and beings.

All nations belong to him
and he will eventually rule them with justice and equity.
That is the promise of the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament,
a promise that is fulfilled God's coming in the flesh in Jesus Christ.

Luke's Gospel emphasizes the continuity
between this prophetic tradition and the coming of God in Jesus
more than the other gospels.

It's there in all of them, but especially strong in Luke,
which we have been reading along with our Psalms this year.
In Luke 4:14-21, Jesus begins his public mission in his home town.
The passage he read from Isaiah is significant:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

Then he told his listeners,
no doubt many of whom were long-time friends,
that this prophesy was being fulfilled in their hearing that day.
Luke commented that all spoke well of him
and were amazed at the gracious words he spoke.

But these are the same values we found in Psalm 82.
Continually cultivate the sight to see injustice, says Jesus, then do justice.
That's the message.

In the parable of the good Samaritan we read this morning,
the message is the same.

The hero of the story is not even a religious Israelite,
thought there were opportunities for the religious leaders of the day
to step into that role.

They saw the situation
and passed by on the other side.

The Samaritan,
one despised and rejected by the Jews because of historical hatreds,
showed mercy.

For Jesus, the origins and beliefs of a person
were less important than their willingness to show mercy.
His conclusion to the religious and social leaders listening is simple –
“Go and do the same.”

We can easily become overwhelmed these days
by the injustices that surround us in this world.

Modern versions of the gods and powers
that the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
are everywhere working their evil and wicked ways,
often disguised in respectable and legitimate trappings.

But injustice is injustice whoever is doing it.
Lack of mercy is lack of mercy whoever is acting this way.

We are faced with a choice
if we really hear the message of this Psalm.

It's a choice many have faced before –
the singers of this Psalm,
the listeners to Jesus' parable,
those who have answered Christ's call
and gone to be with the weak and orphaned,
the lowly, the destitute, and the needy
wherever they are found around the world.

They are here in our own community.
We pass them every day.

When you encounter them this week,
will you show mercy?

Will you smile and acknowledge them as the beloved of Jesus Christ?

Will you consider ways to do justice, love kindness,
and walk humbly with your God?

I don't have an easier answer to how to join in God's work of justice.

It is a series of choices,
day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year.

Think of the kinds of choices God sets before his people in the Scriptures.

In Moses final oration to the people of Israel renewing the covenant - Deut 30:19:

... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.

A little later in the history of Israel, with Josuah's renewal of the covenant –
Josuah 24:15:

*Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord,
choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served
in the region beyond the River or the gods
or the Amorites in whose land you are living;
but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

And the people of Israel chose to serve the Lord,
the One who had brought them and their ancestors out of Egypt,
out of the injustice of slavery and out of the destitution of the desert.
They chose to serve the God who had forged them into a community
covenanted with that God
to be an example of justice, peace and well-being.

That is our calling, our opportunity, and our choice as well.

Will we be God's mission people in the world,
doing everything we can with the gifts God has given us
to treat ourselves and all others as God's beloved friends?

I can think of no better way to end this sermon
filled with challenge and choice
than Jeremiah's advice to the people of Israel
when they were taken into exile in Babylon – Jer 29:7:

*Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

May we find in our relationship with Jesus Christ
the wisdom and strength
to work with God and choose life over death
in all that we are and do.

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